

Resettlement and its impacts: The Case of Metekel Awarajja (1984-85)

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Abstract

The resettlement projects in Ethiopia have been carried out mainly as a response to extreme problems of drought, food insecurity, population growth and land degradation during the imperial and Derg regime in the 1960's and 1980's. The disastrous famine of 1984-85 brought equally disastrous response of Derg government which relocated peasants from famine affected north to the sparsely populated and unoccupied southwest of the country. One of the targeted areas to perform was the Metekel area called Pawie or Beles resettlement site along North Western Ethiopia, originally inhabited by the Gumuz shifting cultivators. The inadequately planned of the Pawie or Belesresettlement site from the 1984-85 was affected the relocated people and the indigenous Gumuz communities. This program resulted Gumuz communities clashed with state sponsored settlers. After a long time tension, the settlers and the host communities formed a bond of relationship known as Wadaj.

1. Overview of the Resettlement

The concept of resettlement has been very intangible to define due to the causes and the actors making the decision to resettle. With consideration of causes and decision of actors, different scholars use different terms for the process of population relocation to new location (Tewodros, 2011:22). For Berhanu, resettlement is the movement of individuals or a group of people either spontaneously or planned from their original settlement sites to resettle in new areas. Settlers can begin new trends of life by adapting themselves to the ethno-cultural, social and administrative systems of the new environment. He argued that resettlement was carried out due to food shortage, population pressure, unemployment, marginality of land and decline in productivity (Berhanu, 2007:11). Resettlement is speedy decision which enables to give immediate solution for social, political and economic factors (Bisrat, 2011: 9). According to Tewodros, resettlement refers to “a process involving the movement of the people away from their place of origin and its effect on the resettlers, hosts and the environment (Tewodros, 2011:26).

Resettlement is an age old happening in Ethiopia either spontaneously or a planned basis. Individual resettlement occurs on household and family level whereas group resettlement tends to be based on government policies and is coordinated and

implemented by state official. There was no real statistics that showed the number of peoples resettled in Ethiopia in the previous times (Tilland Irit, 2011:4). The resettlement projects have been carried out mainly as a response to extreme problems of drought, food insecurity, population growth and land degradation during the imperial regime in the 1960's (Bisrat, 2011:11). Under the imperial regime in the 1960's, not only spontaneously but also state-sponsored resettlers have been displaced from the north and resettled in the South and Southwest of the country (Tizazu, 2011:24).

After collapse of the imperial regime, resettlement program was sponsored or state motivated and motives related to famine and drought prevention, food production, national security and population implemented by Derggovernment in the 1980's (Wolde Sellassie, 2000:412). There location of peasants from famine affected north to the sparsely populated and unoccupied South and North West of the country caused by the disastrous famine of 1984-85 (Alula, 1992:218). The resettlement can be considered as the first government action aimed to remove the peasants from famine affected areas, giving them the opportunity to research a status of material wellbeing in the years of 1984-85 (Dario: 80; Thomas P. and Leverie, 1991:49). The 1984-85 resettlements were conducted in three ways. The three ways were the establishment of unoccupied and virgin areas in to productive, the exploitation of pastoral lowlands by agriculture and the formation of settlers into peasant associations with surplus land (Giordano, 1986: 217).

The densely forest areas and low population density of the country were the sites of the resettlement program in the 1984-85's (Dejenie, 2011:9). About 300,000 people were relocated from drought affected and over populated region in to resettlement sites, located in the western and Southwestern parts of Ethiopia (Helmut and Aynalem, 1989:116). The Ethiopian government carried out this resettlement program in two phases. In the first phase, 50,000 people relocated into regions of Wollega, Illubabour and Kaffa. The phase took to form of integrated settlement or Sigesaga. The second phase had targeted to resttle 250, 000 families in the lowlands Awarajjas of Metekel, Gambella, Assosa and Mettema (Ibid).

This article underlined on the Metekel area called Pawie or Beles resettlement site along North Western Ethiopia, originally inhabited by the Gumuz shifting cultivators received about 82,000 people greater than the total size of its population (Gebre, 2002:32). The Pawie catchment in the Metekel Awarajja was selected as resettlement sites by the government on the basis of stability for human and animal habitation, adequate and reliable rainfall, fertile soil for production purposes, sufficient water for human and animal consumption and availability of sufficient unoccupied land (Getachew, 1989:364). The area was selected as a site for this 1984-85 massive

resettlement program. The selection was based on occasional official tours, simple observation and topographic maps. Selection site and prior preparation was conducted without feasible study. The Pawie area was made on the ground as a sufficient and unoccupied vast land (Informants: Kassaw Ali, AbetawTarakaw, DarassaTamachew).The area was as wellinhabited by sparsely settled Gumuz Communities who practiced shifting cultivation (Berihun, 2009:351).

The selected area for resettlement inMetekel Awarajja was infested with human and cattle disease. Disease including Malaria, Bilharzias and meningitis brought a huge health problem from human habitation particularly for the new settlers. Besides, human disease, the prevalence of test fly hindered the cattle rearing in the area. Similarly, the important social service such as clinics, houses, schools and water supply were not sufficiently constructed for the new comers. This was enhanced mortality among resettlers in the resettlement site (Informants: Kassaw Ali, Abetaw Tarakaw, Darassa Tamachew).

2. Methodology

Both oral and written sources are used in this study. The oral sources were collected from Kembata and Hadiya from the southern Shewa and Amhara from the areas of Gojjam, Gonder, Wollo, Menzeand Gishe who are resettled and now living either together with the Gumuz or neighboring them. In most cases, the informants from Kembata, Hadiya and Amhara, were those who directly resettled in resettlement site. The written sources, where the secondary documents and publications focusing on the resettlement and its impact in the MetekelAwarajja. The secondary sources are collected from periodicals, document analysis, Thesis dissertations, internet sources and other reports. Oral and written sources collected through this method would be carefully examined, cross-checked, interpreted and analyzed to give meaningful justifications for the study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Ethnic and Cultural Composition of the Resettlement Site

The ethnic and cultural composition of the resettled population in the Metekel of the Pawie resettlement site was heterogeneous which came from different parts of Ethiopia and they had different ethno—cultural, social and economic way of life (Dario: 82). There were two types of resettlers in the area. Those were famine victims and those with chronic land hunger, not seriouslyaffected by famine. Peasants affected by the famine and those with chronic land shortage were targeted to be resettled. The first arrivals were Kembata and Hadiya from the southern Shewa and from areas in Gojjam and Gonder provinces that faced chronic land shortage.

Later on, Victims of famine mainly from Wollo, Menz and Giske moved to Pawie resettlement site in the Metekel Awarajja (Dessalegn, 1988:18). Settlers were ordered to erect temporary huts and forced to share houses until the construction of enough houses. For this unkind incident, they disturbed to adopt new environment with the sum of human and cattle disease which made the situation worse (Informants: Kassaw Ali, Abetaw Tarakaw, Darassa Tamachew). They moved to the unfamiliar Metekel lowland and resettled in 48 villages on both sides of the Beles River. Upon arrival, they witnessed a completely new area different from the reality what they expected before their departure (Ibid).

The settlers lived under the harsh conditions until they earned the Italian agencies initiated emergency relief program and large scale agro-industrial development projects in the Metekel resettlement area in 1986 (Wolde Sellassie, 2000:423). Within the coalition of the Ethiopian government, the Italian agencies provided immediate relief aid including food, clothing, blankets, household utensils and medical assistance to the famine victims. This was brought the lasting effects in improving the living standards of the people. The development based project sponsored by the Italian cooperation program known as the Tana-Beles resettlement project (Dario: 79).

3.2. The Tana- Beles Project

It was organized in the Metekel region in the Gojjam province and was located between longitude $36^{\circ} 20'$ - $36^{\circ} 32'$ E and latitude $11^{\circ} 12'0''$ - $11^{\circ} 21'0''$ N. The project was aimed directly towards the achievement of surplus agricultural production, starting from the improvement of the mechanization process and the introduction of a collective organization of the labor force. It was planned to connect Beles River with Lake Tana by diverting water. The diverted water hoped to use to generate power and increased the capacity of Beles River for large scale irrigation (Ibid:83).

The Tana- Beles project had three phases: "emergency phase (1986), phase for the consolidation of works (1987-1990) and the self - management and self -sufficiency phase 1990-1993" (Jira, 2008:80). At the same time with the distribution of relief aid to the settlers, the project focused on two sectors. The first sector was production that included mechanized agriculture, forestation, livestock production, fishery, agro-industry and a pipe factory. Secondly, the project launched the development of infrastructures encompassed the water supply, roads, bridges, houses, stores, airport, health centers, schools and other social service institutions (Gebre, 2002 : 35). In addition to this, settlers were given training and technical assistance in the sectors of agriculture, forestation, hand crafts and child care and pre-school education by the non-governmental organization is said to be International

Committee for the development of people. The project played pivotal role in alleviating the problems of the settlers and improving their living standards. But, the projects negative side was absence of given assistance services to the originally inhabited neighboring communities in the area. As result of this, the Gumuz communities were forced to leave in their localities of the project's attempt to produce varieties of grains and construct infrastructures for the settlers (Informants: Kassaw Ali, AbetawTarakaw, DarassaTamachew).

The state sponsored settlers were settled in the areas selected by resettlement administering authorities without consulting the host communities, assessing the capacity of receiving areas to accommodate settlers and factoring in the implications of the resettlement program to the host population and the environment (Kassa, 2004: 225). The scheme operated in the area had not given due attention to the indigenous Gumuz communities and threatened their resources without their permission. It destroyed the ecological balance of their habitat. This situation in the early stage of settlers' arrival resulted enmity and violent clashes between the host communities and resettled families (Informants: Dametawkebede, GetuDankaw, Kassaw Ali).

3.3. Enmity and Violent Clashes between the Host and Resettled communities

The Gumuz communities disapproved the resettlement program and expressed their grievances by attacking resettlers on the road, in the forest and sometimes in their homes during nights in the villages bordering them. Then, the government recruited the militia men among settlers in order to maintain peace and security for the settlers. But, the militia could not stop the hidden killing. This led retaliatory actions that directly led to confrontation between the Gumuz and the settlers (Ibid). The fierce first confrontation broke out between resettlers of Hadyia and Kambata and the Gumuz on Tahsas 18, 1984 E.C. (Dec, 1991). In the conflict, the members of Gumuz attacked the resettlers by using bullet. On the next day, on Tahsas 19, 1984 E.C. the Gumuz attacked the resttlers of village three who were in prayer program of protestant church (WoldeSellassie, 1997: 119). A more, violent broke out on Sept 11, 1993 in which Gumuz men attacked the resttlers who came to the market. Partly for this security problem, the site was abandoned and all settlers were transferred from Gubelak area to Beles (Pawie) resettlement area. After better organization, the resttlers took revenge which caused the death of more Gumuz Communities (Informants: GetuDankaw, Kassaw Ali, AbetawTarakaw).

The Gumuz believed that resettlement destroyed land use system and forest products and other resources traditionally available to them. Forest products and fishing are important supplements to the consumption and income to the Gumuz

being closed off. Due to the land holding system, the Gumuz started to take sever against from new settlers. The program resulted inter-ethnic conflict between the settlers and the indigenous people (Gumuz) in the region (Informants: DiminiManjja, WudemEmbaw, Kidane, Bademe). Therefore, the question of cultivable land was another reason caused conflict between the host communities (Gumuz) and settlers following resettlement in the 1987. The clash led to problems of transportation and destruction of the projects has assisted the settlers by the host communities. After the occasion, the government attempted to prevent fighting through gun control and the deployment of armed forces (Informants: Dametawkebede, GetuDankaw, Kassaw Ali). The difference in the concept of land became one of the fundamental reasons for the conflict between the native and the resttlers. Members of the Gumuz ethnic group stated in the account of Dario as follows:

With the resttlers the war was for land. Nobody has its own land. The land is big end every person's works together without saying this is mine and is yours. At the harvest time we share the fruits of our work. This is rule in Gumuz people. They want all the land. Every Gumuz was free to farm where he wanted, but, after their arrival, we have forgotten the meaning of peace (Dario:86).

Their conflict was mostly related with the encroachment over land resources and generally over the use of natural resources (Taddese, 1982: 2). The ceaseless encroachment of resettlers on the land traditionally farmed by the indigenous population and perceived better social services aroused conflict between resettlers and indigenous communities. This conflict clearly showed the failure of resettlement schemes (WoldeSellassie, 1997:26). The resettlement program has also taken away traditional resources of the indigenous host communities that affected their livelihood because their lives are mainly based on shifting cultivation, hunting, fishing and honey collection (Informants: DiminiManjja, WudemEmbaw, Kidane, Bademe). This resettlement program affected the Gumuz in various ways. Firstly, the practical settlement of settlers in the Pawie catchment area of the Metekel forced the Gumuz communities from their original areas. Unused land in the resettlement site but vital to the next Gumuz generation and their cultivated lands were given to settlers as a settled areas and farm lands. This was damaged the Gumuz agrarian system that consequently resettled the deterioration of consumption and income. Secondly, the program affected the Gumuz's economic activity known as shifting cultivation. Scarcity of a farm land to perform shifting cultivation faced

among themselves due to the expansion of human settlement and livestock of settlers in the area (Ibid).

Jira discussed in his account quoted from the Gebre, “These new developments reflected the beginning of the disruption of shifting cultivation as a way of life. The Gumuz communities directly impacted by the resettlement were in a real crisis because no alternative survival strategies had been identified” (Jira, 2008:82). Establishment of settlement in the areas inhabited by Gumuz people has brought the loss of their traditionally land and heightened the existing problem land scarcity in the region, disrupted their agricultural and non-agricultural modes of appropriation and had introduced ecological problem (Informants: DiminiManjja, WudemEmbaw, Kidane,Bademe). The host community’s income declined. As a result of this, the host community’s land tenure system was changed from communal control of land to private control, leasing land and selling wood (Ibid).

Additionally, the auxiliary economic activity of Gumuz was severely affected by the program. Their coping strategies that used as diet hunting wild animals and gathering wild fruits reduced because of the forests cleared indiscriminately by the settlers for residential, fire wood, charcoal, housing and for farm. The clearing of forests for those purposes has caused mass deforestation and soil erosion especially in lowland areas of resettlement sites (Ibid). WoldeSellassie explained that the Gumuz get more protein from hunting wild animals than from domestic animals (WoldeSellassie, 2002: 82). Their former hunting grounds and honey collection from hollow trunks of big trees and caves along the banks of rivers and streams were damaged by the settlers. Also, they lost the access to fish from the Beles River as a result of their physical dislocation from the river banks. This dispossession of host people from vital natural resources had weakened their traditional livelihood, economic and habitat system (Informants: DiminiManjja, WudemEmbaw, Kidane,Bademe).

Therefore, resettlement in Metekel has not been based on the comprehensive studies of the areas resource potential. In the acceleration in which the resettlement program was carried out, the indigenous shifting cultivator, hunters and gatherers were not considered in the development process. This resulted in their resistance to resettlement and initiated the host communities to develop negative attitudes as they view resettlers as competitors over the use of natural resources (Informants: Dametawkebede, GetuDankaw, Kassaw Ali). Resettlement threatened and violated the rights of indigenous communities, marginalizing and displacing them from the land and other resources that belonged to them by tradition. This was brought

hostility of the host communities towards resettlers(Ibid).Abeje clearly stated the perception of host communities towards resettlers as follows:

The host communities expect to be from provision of infrastructure and social services designed for the resettlers. If their expectations are not met, the attitudes of hosts may be more hostile towards resettlement schemes. Hence, to minimize conflicts and create a common interests in the success of resettlement program, planning for the provision of economic and social services must take into account the needs of the host and the resettled population(Abeje, 2011:26).

The resettlement sites of Pawie in Metekel also brought several social impacts on the new comers. At the initial stage of settlement, language was a big barrier to communicate with the settlers particularly at resettlement sites due to the fact that settlers were came from a different ethnic group and culture(Informants: DametawKebede, GetuDankaw, Kassaw Ali). The program was disintegrated the settlers' institutions and organizations.Institutional arrangement included idir provided both the legal framework and insurance in their original areas under respective parish, mosque, clan or village groups and kinship ties became invalid by the resettlement (Ibid).

In addition to this, the resettlers' production system and impoverished their livelihood was disrupted by the program. Even the readjust themselves to the local area has resulted in a significant socio-economic differentiations among themselves. This was created uncertainties and confusion among resettlers' until they adapted the new government. And, the resettlement brought the families to be broken i.e. the total death of kinship. It was carried out in lowland area where the climate was completely different from their original homeland. As a result, the newclimate was less hospitable that led to excessive mortality among resettlers due to disease (Ibid).Inadequately planned resettlement of Metekel in North West Ethiopia has showed the long term impacts on the resettlers, hosts and on the environment(Tewodros, 2011: 17).

3.4. Relations of Host Communities with Settlers

The resettlement sites are places where diversification is clearly found.Resettlersvividly reflected their cultural and religious differences in the settled areas. These diversities might have challenged in the social adaption and integration.Resettlement, according to Abeje, is a process individuals or group of people leave their original settlement sites to resettle in new areas, where they can begin new trends of diversified socio-cultural way of life among themselves and even with host communities (Abeje, 2011:82). After a long time of the tension by

their diversification and competition over the use natural resources had begun the relation between settlers and hosts. But, the relation did not get necessary consideration it needed by planners and implementers. Intolerance between resettlers and host people has been mostly mediated by the use of natural resources. Most of the relations between the resettlers and host people in many of settlement areas are limited in economic ground. However, the relation between them has gone in some cases beyond the economic changes to the social and religious interactions (Tewodros, 2011:19).

Relation between resettlers and host people in resettlement sites depended on the ethnicities of resettlers and host people, their proximity to each other, the resource and land use of resettlers and host people and market interactions at the village level (Sara, 2003:40). Their socio-economic relationships between resettlers and host communities enhanced assimilation and integration. This may help the resettlers to adapt the new environment and reduced frustration (Terefe, 2012:134). On the other hand, Gumuz communities benefited from the experience they shared from the resettlers in agricultural practices. Host communities in this area, in addition to their main activity in hunting, gathering and honey collection, used to grow only maize using hoe-culture. But, after the arrival of the resettlers, they shared experience from the resettlers on agricultural practices and increased the variety of crops which resulted in a better income from crop sale (Informants: Dimini Manjja, Wudem Embaw, Kidane, Bademe).

The smooth relation between resettlers and Gumuz communities took place at markets. On the market days, the two groups interact and exchange products at the market places of village four and seven. The agricultural products like finger-millet, sorghum, Pumpkins and pepper are sold by the Gumuz communities in those market places (Informants: Dametaw Kebede, Getu Dankaw, Kassaw Ali). Besides, their women participation to sell the fire and fuel wood for the settler people who lived in the town of Almu (village five) and village four. In exchange, the resettlers supplied local drink known as areki and spices for the Gumuz societies (Ibid).

As noted in the above, the spontaneous settler's communities of the Metekel Awarajja after long time tension established smooth relationship with Gumuz communities. They interact with each other by the formation of bond relationship said to be Wadaj (Ibid). Likewise, the state sponsored resettlers in the area interacted with host communities by forming Wadaj relationship. As result of this, the resettlers were getting farming land in the form of contract for two or more years from nearby Gumuz communities. The Gumuz children rarely attended the elementary schools with the resettlers children nearby resettler village 3, 101 and 134 (Ibid).

4. Conclusion

The Resettlement program in Ethiopia was spontaneous or state motivated and motives related to famine and drought prevention, food production, national security and population implemented by the imperial regime in 1960's and Derg government in the 1980's. The selected area for resettlement during Derg regime was MetekelAwarajja, Pawie or Beles resettlement site, North Western Ethiopia from 1984-85. The resettles of the 1984-85 MetekeleAwarajja were Kembata and Hadiya from the southern Shewa and from areas in Gojjam and Gonder provinces that faced chronic land shortage and the people of Wollo, Menze and Gishe which victimized by the famine. The program affected the shifting cultivation and coping strategies such as hunting, gathering, fishing and honey bee collection of the indigenous Gumuzcommunities in the study area. This caused enmity and violent clashes between the settlers and the Gumuz communities. Their clash was resolved through the formation of bond relationship said to be Wadaja.

Conflict interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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Informants

No	Name	Age	Place of Interview	Date of Interview	Remarks
1	AbetawTar kaw(Ato)	75	Pawie (village 24)	21/7/2013	An Amahra settler who comes from Mottaarea that gives constructive idea about the 1984-85 resettlements, its impact and relations between Gumuz and settlers.
2	DametawK ebede(Ato)	65	Pawie (village 49)	22/7/2013	He is Wollo settler with good memories of the 1984-85 resettlement and the relations of Gumuz with settlers.
3	DeressaT amchew(Ato)	70	Pawie (village 49)	22/7/2013	He is Wollo settler who has detailed knowledge about the 1984-85 resettlements, its impact and the relation between Gumuz and settlers.
4	DiminiMan jja(Ato)	75	Mandura	11/7/2013	A Gumuz informant with good knowledge on the relations of Agaw with Gumuz. He has also detailed knowledge about the impacts of the 1984-85 resettlements on the Gumuz communities.
5	GetuDank aw(Ato)	82	Pawie (village	21/7/2013	A settler who came from Motta area with detailed knowledge on the relations between

			24)		Gumuz communities with settlers through Wadaj.
6	Kassaw Ali(Ato)	71	Pawie (village 49)	22/7/2013	Wollo settler who give clear idea about the 1984-85 resettlements, its impact on the host and settlers.
7	KidaneBad eme(Ato)	70	Mandura	28/7/2013	He is farmer Gumuz elder who openly showed the impacts of the 1984-85 resettlements on the Gumuz communities.
8	WudemE mbaw(Ato)	83	Dangur	3/8/2013	A well-knownGumuz elder with detailed information about the impacts of the 1984-85 resettlements on the Gumuzcommunities.